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Aracelinda Jeffers, 20, hugs her brother Jose Jeffers, 14, at the Families are Forever event in Cheshire. The siblings are part of a Meriden family of five adopted children..

# Adoptions celebrated by DCF

**By Adam Wittenberg**

Record-Journal staff

**CHESHIRE** — Meredith Jeffers wanted 12 kids, but has settled for five, although she is in the process of adopting two more.

Jeffers, of Meriden, was one of more than 700 parents and

their children attending the sixth annual Families are Forever event at Holiday Hill Tuesday, a celebration of adoptions conducted through the state Department of Children and Families.

"Together as a family, we are one," said Araceli Jeffers,

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# □ DCF celebrates adopted children

20, as she stood with her arms around her four younger siblings, two related by birth and two by adoption. "He's hyper, she's quick, she's wild and he's crazy. We all have love for each other. Mom helps us out a lot."

It will be seven years at the end of this month since Meredith Jeffers united Araceli and her two siblings with a brother and sister Jeffers had adopted three years prior.

"I always wanted to be a foster mom and an adopted mom since I was 4," said the eldest Jeffers, an ordained minister with the United Church of Christ. "I really believed permanency for kids was important."

The children, who range in age from 13-20, have taken so well to their new home that their mother is in the process of adopting two adult siblings, one from each set.

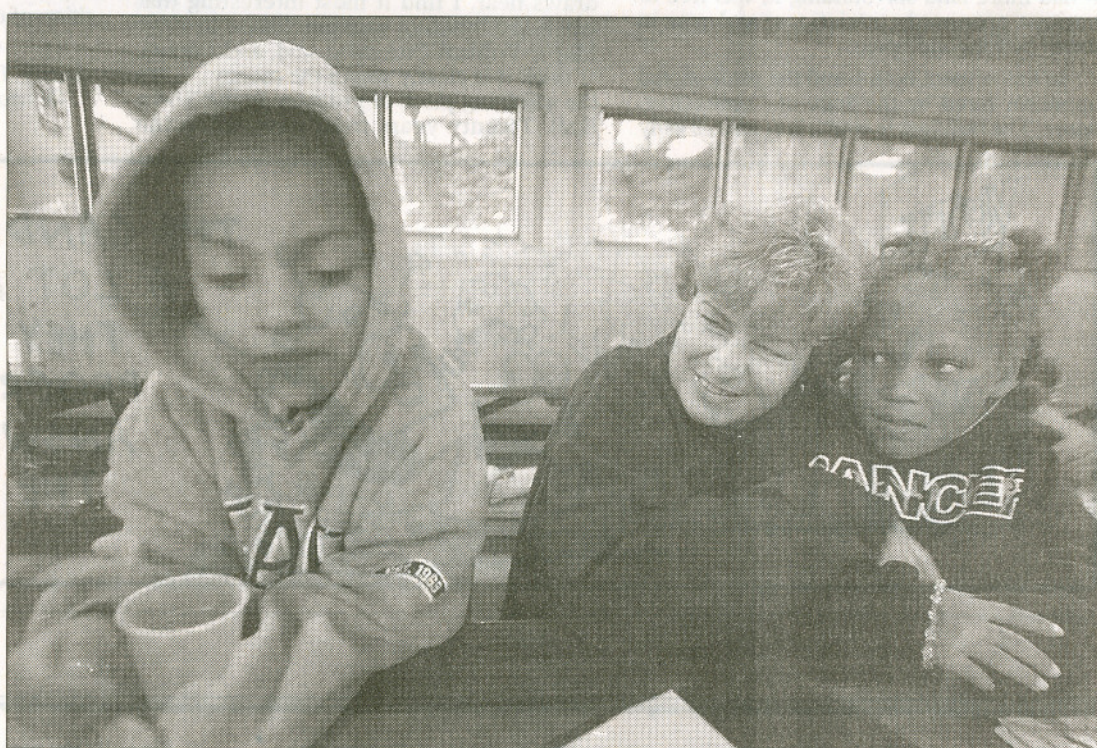
The older adoptees live independently, but Jeffers wants to give them the same sense of permanence.

"They need to know they're not just another throwaway foster kid," she said, "that a family cares for them."

For each of the last five years, the state has transitioned more than 500 children from foster care to adoptive homes, making DCF the largest adoption agency in the state.

Some advantages of going through DCF include cost, time and the availability of state services.

"Lots of people don't know about the medical insurance (for children), financial stipend (for parents), adoption assis-



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Ashley Cronin grasps her drink while eating at Holiday Hill in Cheshire Tuesday with her adoptive mother, Aline Cronin, center, and adopted sister Kaisha, 7, right. More than 700 parents and their children took part Tuesday in the Families Are Forever celebration sponsored by the Department of Children and Families.

tance and post-adoption services that we offer," said June M. Wiehn, who heads the DCF bureau in charge of both in-state and interstate adoptions. "Also, it doesn't cost any money. We don't charge a home study fee, and we subsidize the cost of probate court. To go international would cost \$25,000 for a similar adoption."

The state pays about \$600 per month for an infant, Wiehn said, and as much as \$1,300-\$1,400 for a child with complex medical issues.

The children get HUSKY medical insurance until age 21, and all children adopted from 2005 onward are eligible to receive up to the full University of Connecticut in-state tuition amount toward their college or post-secondary education.

Those incentives, and a love for children, have led Daniel and Robin Davies of Wallingford to go through the process

three times.

Robin, a special education paraprofessional at the private High Roads School for children with special needs, became interested in adopting foster children nine years ago, when she worked at a homeless shelter.

The adoptions of Nate, 18, Bethy, 7, and Gloria, 2, have gone well and, "We wouldn't change anything," Robin Davies said.

But accepting children, some of whom have experienced trauma and abandonment, has its challenges.

Kim Haskell of Cheshire adopted two brothers, Cody, 11, and Robert, 15, nine years ago.

She describes her older son as a typical 15-year-old, but the younger has required significant care for reactive attachment disorder and other psychological issues.

Haskell, a special education teacher at Berlin High School,

said it was easier to acquire state services for her boys when she had them as foster children.

"Overall, it's been very, very difficult to get the services Cody needs and get them paid for," Haskell said. "I'm willing to stick it out, it's just that we need support."

The state has made recent changes to ensure more services are available until children turn 18, and created the Adoption Assistance Program, a free service to families that is in its second year.

"We want to find homes for all of them," Frances Cooke, a supervisor in the adoption bureau, said of the children on the state's waiting list.

To view the list, see [www.ct.gov/dcf](http://www.ct.gov/dcf) or call (888) KID-HERO (543-4376).